My Lady Cinderella

By Mrs. C. N. Williamson

CHAPTER IV.—(Continued.)

"Ah!" she sneered, "perhaps the Queen has begged you to come and be a maid of honor?"

"Really, you are not so far wrong," I retorted. "A lady—a woman of title—has invited me to pay her a visit. After that she has intimated that she will help me to find work."

"Of all—the—liars—you are the worst and the most barefaced, Consuelo Brand. 'Brand' indeed. I always say it meant the brand of Satan."

The blood rushed so hotly to my face that the tears were forced, stinging, to my eyes.

"Leave my room, woman!" I exclaimed, pointing to the door; "for while I am here in this house it is and shall be mine."

I had hardly known what I was saying, but when the full force of my temerity swept over me I was not even then dismayed. An end was coming now; the earth quaked in the old world that I had known.

She slid the frightened, whimpering two-year-old from her knees, and springing to her feet towered above me.

"You brat! you charity child! you tell me to leave this room! I tell you to leave my house, not in a week, not to-morrow, but now, this minute. Out you go!"

I faced her quivering.

"Do you mean it?"

"As much as I mean that I'm sick to death of you. Not a stick of luggage do you wait for. It can be sent after you to your lady of title. Bah! you make me ill. Go!"

I shut my lips together without a word. I do not think that I could have spoken then if I would. A shower of glittering sparks seemed to be falling before my eyes; but, fumbling, I found my hat and put it on. My gloves, too, which lay beside it on the bed, I mechanically picked up, crushed them in my hand. Then, without turning to look back, I left the room.

Outside in the passage the whirlwind of my quick, blind flight knocked against something, and tumbled over it over. Startled, I collected my faculties sufficiently to see Jimmy, who had thus been punished for listening at the keyhole, and to help him to his feet.

He sneaked downstairs at my side, his small six-year-old body striving to hide itself in my skirt as he went. Half way down, a strident voice from above hurled some inarticulate abuse after me, but I neither paused nor looked up, and Jimmy only cuddled the closer.

At the front door the little boy clung to me with desperate, grimy hands.

"Don't go—don't go, Connie!" he implored. "Maybe she'll be sorry to-morrow. Anyhow, I love you, and I'll be better to you after this if you'll stay; so'll pa. I'll tell him on her, see if I don't. Connie, I can't get along without you—honest true I can't."

CHAPTER V.

Gently, but firmly, I loosened Jimmy's little hands.

"I'm sorry to leave you, dear," I said. "But after what's happened to-night I can't stay any longer. I won't forget you. And by and by I'll write you a letter to your own name. If I have any money, I'll send you a present, too."

Jimmy's tears ceased to fall.

"Will you, true's you live?"

"Yes. And perhaps I shall come back to see you one day in a carriage. Who knows?"

I bent and kissed him, despite the smudges with which his small face was ever adorned save at early morning. Then, before he could grasp me again, I had put him away and closed the door between us. Running down the steps, and out at the gate, I hurried away in the fathering twilight, hardly realizing that the dust of Happholme Villa had indeed been shaken from my feet.

For a long time I flew on, aimless, panting, paying no heed to the way I went. But at last sheer fatigue caused my speed to slacken, and with a shock of surprise it dawned upon me that I did not know where to go.

I had told Lady Sophie de Gretton that I must give Mrs. East a few days' notice before leaving her children, after a residence of five years in her house. Lady Sophie would doubtless have arranged matters in accordance with that expressed intention of mine, so that now it might be inconvenient for her if I were to make my appearance earlier, announcing that I had come to stay.

At all events, it would be impossible for me to go to Park Lane to-night, as she had mentioned that she was dining out, with a theatre party afterwards. Clearly, it would not do to arrive in her absence, with only the servants at home nor could I hang about the door, like a tramp, until twelve o'clock or so, when she might be expected to return.

I began to feel a little frightened, though I by no means regretted my precipitancy in leaving that most inappropriately named domicile, Happholme. In my shabby purse, which I had possessed since before my dear mother's tragic death, coyly nestled one penny, one half-penny, and on impracticable farthing. As I walked on more slowly I examined and thought over these resources.

With the malicious contrariness of human nature, though I could not have eaten the most delicate morsel a few moments ago had it been temptingly served to me in Mrs. East's house, I now began poignantly to feel that I was hungry.

A clock over a cheap jeweler's shop told me that it was half-past eight. I had lunched hastily at twelve on a piece of bread and cheese before going out to join Anne, and I had been far too much excited at Lady Sophie de Gretton's to do more than crumble a bit of icing on my tiny cake as I tasted the tea in one of her Dresden cups.

Oh, how faint I was beginning to be! How my head throbbed, and how desolate I was! A brilliant destiny might be fluttering before me, like a Will-o'-the-wisp, but the present brought tears of homeliness to my eyes. I did not know what I was to do, where I might hope to spend the night.

If Mrs. Bryden had still kept the boarding house in Bloomsbury where my mother and I had lived for several years I might now have gone there. Mrs. Bryden would gladly have accommodated me for a night or two, and let me pay when I could. But she had moved to Surbuton, and I had no money for my railway fare, so that it was hopeless to think of finding shelter with her.

Some people spent their nights in wandering up and down, or dropping into a troubled doze upon the seats on the Embankment, I knew; but I had not the courage to face such an experience, and finally, with extreme reluctance, I permitted the thought of Mrs. Leatherby-Smith to grow within my mind. I had never seen Mrs. Leatherby-Smith, though I seemed to know her only too well from Anne's description of her employer, and I had no reason to believe, from the knowledge which I possessed, that she would give her companion secretary's insignificant friend a warm welcome.

Still, much as I disliked a grudging favor, I thought it would be preferable to entreat Mrs. Leatherby-Smith's hospitality for one night rather than walk the streets, or apply to a Refuge for Homeless Young Women—all spelled with capital letters.

Whatever I did, it was clear that I could not present myself at Lady Sophie de Gretton's till next day at earliest, and Mrs. Leatherby-Smith appeared to be my only other hope. I might sleep with Anne, I reflected, and, after all, I need not make trouble for anyone else in the house.

Having once arrived at a decision, I felt better. But the next thing was to reach Addison Road, where Mrs. Leatherby-Smith lived. A penny would not take me half the distance in an omnibus, but I must ride as far as I could, and accomplish the rest of the journey on foot. My remaining half-penny I expended at a baker's upon a cake so stodgy as to be particularly filling at the price, and ate it, furtive and abject, at a street corner while waiting for the bus to come in sight.

As I did so, with such poor pretence of jauntiness as I could maintain, I thought of Lady Sophie de Gretton, and of the two dainty occupants of the mysterious victoria, wondering grimly what would be their impression if they could see me now.

Somewhat revived, I was ready to make the necessary exertion when the omnibus had brought me as far as it would for a penny and I had to descend and walk.

It was a very long walk, which I made still longer by losing my way more than once. Weary, faint, and miserably doubtful of my reception, I was almost too far gone, when at last I reached Addison Road, to rejoice that I was so near by journey's end.

Mrs. Leatherby-Smith, who had occupied a suite in a fashionable hotel when she first came to London for the season (which meant so much to her nouveau riche ambition), had not been long in Addison Road; but I had written to Anne since her arrival, and I was sure of the address.

"Holland Park House" was the name which I had scrawled on one or two envelopes during the past four weeks; and now, seeing the two words, "Holland Park," glittering in gold letters on a tall iron gateway, I did not wait to let my eyes travel farther along the line, but ventured inside.

A short drive led up to a large building of brick and stone, dignified with a deep porch, the roof of which was supported by massive pillars. I knew that Mrs. Leatherby-Smith was lavish of the money left her by a deceased Birmingham husband, and that she had chosen a place in Addison Road expressly that she might be able to give garden parties; but I had hardly expected to see such an imposing mansion as this. It looked big enough for two or three Mrs. Leatherby-Smiths to give parties all at the same time.

Big double doors stood hospitably open. Within, other doors, half composed of jeweled glass, were tightly closed. A light shone through, and here and there in the house other lights filtered through drawn curtains; but many windows were dark. Probably, I thought, Mrs. Leatherby-Smith was out; but Anne would be at home, and not yet in bed, as it was not much after ten o'clock.

I touched an electric bell, and an elderly man, in a plain, business livery, answered my ring.

"Is — is Miss Bryden at home?" I hesitated.

The man looked puzzled.

"Miss Bryden? I don't know the name," he replied.

"She is Mrs. Leatherby-Smith's companion."

The cloud of his bewilderment did not lift.

"Is Mrs. Leatherby-Smith visiting here?" he inquired with an air of painful conscientiousness. "We have no tenant by that name, miss."

"But this is Mrs. Leatherby-Smith's house, isn't it?" I questioned hastily. "Surely Holland Park House——"

"Ah, you've made a mistake, then. This is Holland Park Mansions. Holland Park House is next door but one, miss. I'll show you, if you like."

"Thank you," I had begun, and was already moving farther from the door, when from within a man came out in so great a hurry that the janitor was obliged to forget his dignity and give a funny little hop out of the way.

I, too, stepped aside, expecting to see the man continue his headlong career down the drive to the gate; but instead he stopped abruptly on the threshold and gazed at me.

He was a man of middle age, well dressed and substantial looking, with old-fashioned side whiskers, gray hair, and round, gold-bowed, smoked spectacles that lent him a benevolent air. In his hand was a telegraph form, crushed up with the opened envelope.

"I beg your pardon," he said; then paused, as if undecided how to follow up his preface. I gleaned a rapid impression that he fancied we had met before, and, though his face was strange to me, oddly enough I vaguely had the same feeling in regard to him.

The pause was very short; he had scarcely given himself more than time to draw breath, although it certainly had seemed that for the fraction of a second he had sought eagerly for an idea, an inspiration.

Then, "I beg your pardon," he said again. "But didn't I hear you inquiring for Holland Park House? The people there are your frinds?"

"I don't know Mrs. Leatherby-Smith," I confessed humbly. "But her companion, Miss Anne Bryden, is a friend of mine."

The face of the middle-aged man brightened with a smile. I racked my brain to think where, if ever, I had seen him before; but the recollection would not come.

"Ah, Miss Anne Bryden! She is a friend of mine also. It is a great pity, if you are going to Holland Park House to-night, that Mrs. Leatherby-Smith and Miss Bryden are both away. They are not expected to return until to-morrow. You may have heard Miss Bryden speak of me."

"No," I replied, my heart sinking at the news of Anne's absence. "I don't think she has mentioned you. But, then, I haven't seen much of her since she and Mrs. Leatherby-Smith came to live in Addison Road. It is very odd, however, that Anne said nothing to me when I was with her this afternoon about going away for all night."

"I dare say she did not know, then," Mr. Wynnstay explained, regarding my changed countenance intently. "Mrs. Leatherby-Smith is a woman of quick decisions. They—er—left quite suddenly, as I happen to know. I'm sorry my little friend Miss Bryden forgot to mention my existence, for, had she done so, you would be more ready to let me help you in any way possible if you are inconvenienced by her unexpected absence. I trust, however, that—er—you are not inconvenienced?"

If I had been quite myself I might successfully have maintained an air of graceful reserve; but I was weak with fatigue and hunger, which had developed into a wiry headache, with little hot and cold flashes of giddiness. My eyes were so full of tears that a fall of my lashes sent two plashing over my cheeks, and after that it was useless to pretend that I was idiferent.

"I don't quite know what to do," I choked, "for I thought Anne would surely have been at home. However, it doesn't matter at all. I am much obliged to you, sir, for saving me the trouble of going on to Holland Park House. Good night."

"But, my dear young lady, you must really forgive me; I can't let you go away like that. Pray wait, and let us have a moment's conversation. Denby" —to the janitor—"place a chair for the lady. She is tired."

These last sentences were delivered with authority, and obeyed with alacrity. Evidently Mr. Wynnstay was a respected tenant of Holland Park Mansions.

I sat down not because my mind desired it, but because my knees insisted.

"You were very anxious, I fear, to see Miss Bryden?" said the gentleman with side whiskers.

"I meant to stop to-night with her," I admitted, "—I happened to be rather far from home, and it is late. But——"

"Of course. Quite so. And now you are somewhat at a loss. As a friend of Mrs. Leatherby-Smith's and Miss Bryden's, you must permit me to advise you."

"Where have I seen you before?" I demanded abruptly—or, rather, something within me, over which I had no control, seemed to ask the question.

Mr. Wynnstay's face stiffened.

"If we had met before, it is impossible that I should have forgotten it," he said politely. But, despite the politeness, for some reason which I could not understand, my words had displeased and disconcerted him.

CHAPTER VI.

What I Saw in the Mirror.

I felt that I must be growing morbid, looking for mysteries and hidden meanings everywhere, even in the most unlikely places, as I had appeared continually to do during the past few eventful hours. Perhaps I had imagined Mr. Wynnstay's displeasure; at any rate, it apparently lasted but for an instant.

"It would certainly not be agreeable for you to go to Holland Park in both ladies' absence, as you are not acquainted with Mrs. Leatherby-Smith," he went on, revealing his consideration for my forlornness, "and simply announce to the servants that you intended to stop the night. Unless they al-

"I shouldn't dream of attempting ready know you very well I fear they would hesitate to let you in."

such a thing," I returned. "You have been good to take an interest; but now I really must go, and——"

"Pray wait. I see a way out of the difficulty," Mr. Wynnstay interpolated. "If you will come into my study, which is close by on this floor, and sit for a few minutes while I give you a letter to the housekeeper, telling her (on my responsibility) to take you up to Miss Bryden's room, she will without doubt do so. Then Mrs. Leatherby-Smith need know nothing of the transaction until you see Miss Bryden and she explains matters satisfactorily to her employer. What do you say to that plan?"

I hardly knew what to say. The man was a stranger to me; it was distasteful to accept a favor from him; the whole affair was distressing; and I could scarcely bring myself to pass a night under Mrs. Leatherby-Smith's roof without her permission. But the alternate was appalling. I was penniless; it was now nearer eleven than ten; the night loomed black and full of horrors to my sensitized imagination.

"I think I must accept your kindness," I said. "Perhaps—would it not be better if you would take me to the door of Holland Park House, instead of troubling to write a letter? I fancy you were going out when I——"

"It will be better to write," he reiterated; and going to the door through which I had seen him come out into the hall he threw it open.

There was darkness within at first, but in a second or two Mr. Wynnstay's hand had found the electric button, and the room was illuminated by a clear and brilliant light.

"We shall not be long, Denby," announced my benefactor, as if to set me at my ease with the janitor, who had been decorously drinking in our conversation. "You may be at hand, if you please, to show the lady out when she is ready to go."

These words relieved me from anger of being placed in a false position, and my gratitude toward Mr. Wynnstay increased. He was certainly remarkably thoughtful, and I reproached myself for a dim feeling of physical repulsion against him which had sprung up in my breast with the first glimpse of his benevolent, middle-aged countenance.

"Perhaps the man of whom he reminds me was connected with some disagreeable experience or other which I can't remember, but which I'm now visiting on this innocent and kindly old person," I said to myself as I walked, still with a certain reluctance, into Mr. Wynnstay's domain.

It was a handsomely furnished room, though almost any other appellation than "study" would have been more appropriate to a place where books were so few. However, there were one or two shelves where luxuriously bound volumes turned their handsome leather backs to the audience; on a table magazines and papers were scattered; and there was a desk with a silk-shaded lamp, for which Mr. Wynnstay switched on the electric light.

He did not entirely close the door leading into the hall, so that I still felt easily able to establish communication with the outer world, inhabited by Denby.

"I had the misfortue a few weeks ago to dislocate the thumb of my right hand," my host remarked, when he had laid out writing materials. "It is difficult for me, even now, to use a pen, and I shall be obliged if you will write the letter I mentioned, which I will sign when it is finished. Mrs. Leatherby-Smith's housekeeper will recognize my signature, which she has had occasion to see on one or two legal documents. All you need say is that Miss—er — I don't think, now I come to reflect, that I have the pleasure of knowing your name."

I mentioned it; and he went on to suggest the outlines of such a note to the housekeeper as he thought best calculated to open Mrs. Leatherby-Smith's doors for me. Meanwhile, I had sat obediently down at the desk and taken up a pen.

It appeared to me that if he had accompanied me to Holland Park House, saying a few words of introduction to the servant at the door, who must have been familiar with his face, it would have been a distinct saving of time; but he had chosen otherwise, and it was not for me to question his decision.

As I wrote the letter, which, following on the lines proposed by Mr. Wynnstay, had to be somewhat long and rambling, my host walked up and down the room. I could hear his nervous footfalls on the polished floor whenever he strayed off the big Turkish rug in the centre; but once, for a long moment, the sound of his steps was stilled.

Silence, save for the scratching of the quill pen in my fingers across the paper, reigned in the room. I wrote quickly on, and had nearly reached the end of what I had to say when I heard a faint, clinking noise, like two pieces of glass brought into contact with each other.

"Mr. Wynnstay is surreptitiously refreshing himself with a glass of wine or whisky, behind my back," I thought; "or perhaps he is pouring out something for me, but I certainly won't have it. If he offered me a biscuit instead, in my present state of collapse I might not be able to resist, but wine could not tempt me."

Writing the last few words, I became suddenly conscious that Mr. Wynnstay had come close behind my chair. I had not heard his advance; the rug had deadened the sound of his footsteps, but somehow I felt that he was there. He was looking at the letter under my head, maybe; and the thought that his gaze was fastened on the back of my head made me uncomfortable.

I did not turn to look at him, but I raised my eyes from the paper, and as I did so they focused upon a quaint convey mirror hanging on the wall directly over the desk.

Reflected on its oddly transforming surface I could see myself and, bending over me, Mr. Wynnstay. He was looking not at me, nor at the letter, as I fancied, but at something which he held in his hand; and a prickling thrill ran through my nerves at the notable difference in the man—a difference for which the convex mirror was not wholly responsible.

He was no longer benevolent of aspect. His big mouth hung half open, showing yellow, irregular teeth. The round, smoked spectacles were pushed far up on his frowning forehead, and the eyes looked cruel. With a leap of the heart I knew, in one terrible instant, where I had seen the man before.

The room faded, and I saw with my mind's eyes another picture which blotted all else out. A little girl was in a railway carriage with her mother, a beautiful, worry-faced woman in the heavy mourning which she had worn ever since the child could remember.

They had been whispering together of a wonderful change that was to come into their monotonous life, all through a letter which had arrived that morning —a change the mother could not explain then, but that the little girl would understand by and by, when it came, when everything was different, and they were happier than they had ever been.

The two spoke in low voices, but an old clergyman (with beautiful white hair and a long white beard) who had got in at a station after theirs seemed interested in the couple. When they relapsed into thoughtful silence he kindly offered the mother a share of his papers and magazines. Later, when she complained of a headache, he took from his bag a bottle of smelling salts, begged her to keep it as long as she liked.

She went to sleep with it in her hand at last; and, rather than wake her, the child gently withdrew the bottle from the clasping fingers when the old clergyman was about to leave the train, returning it to him with a grateful smile.

He had bent down to take it, and as he did so the little girl looked up into his eyes. They were curious eyes—one brown, the other grayish-blue, with a mottled yellow line round the pupil. For years the child had not thought of those strange eyes, because a few moments after the clergyman had left the compartment a thing had happened which made all the past seem dim and far away.

At the next station the slender figure in black had fallen sideways, with a slight jerking of the train as it stopped. The little girl, frightened, had attempted to rouse her mother in vain. The sleep into which she had sunk had been that dread sleep which knows no waking.

"Heart failure," the doctors had said; but that was afterwards. The picture which had risen to blur the features of the handsome, commonplace room in Addison Road held only the sleeping mother, the grateful child, the white-haired clergyman with the curious eyes.

I had been that child. And those eyes were reflected now in the mirror over the desk.

CHAPTER VII.

The Plausibility of Mr. Wynnstay.

The old clergyman who had travelled in the same compartment with my mother and me on that saddest day of my life had not been in any sinister way connected with the tragedy—which indeed, only occurred after he had departed. He had been attentive and kind to us; he had looked keenly at me as he went out; these were his sole sins. Yet it was horrible to see the ill-matched eyes again, after all these years, set in a younger face—a face differing in every other feature, framed no longer in an aureole of snowy hair.

How was I so sure they were the same eyes? I could not have explained that; I could not have told my impression coherently enough to prove anything to the most lenient jury; yet I was sure. And being sure, I was filled with greater fear at what I saw.

My glance into the mirror showed me Mr. Wynnstay standing close behind my chair, pouring the contents of a bottle upon a handkerchief. He was stooping over, as if to bring himself even nearer to me. As I looked, my gaze fixed upon the glass with a hateful fascination; the bottle was emptied; I began to inhale a pungent, sickly odor, which was not entirely unfamiliar. Cousin Sarah East used stuff that smelled like this sometimes when she had headaches. It was chloroform.

Instantly I knew what was coming, though why it should come I could not guess. There was no time for speculation—no time for thought at all. With a low cry, I half rose in my chair. The man's stout body, pressing against it now from behind, prevented my putting it back. The slight sound I had uttered caused him to start and lift his head from his task. Our eyes met in the morror.

For my life I could not have withdrawn mine. I saw him in the glass, as he pounced upon me like some bird of prey. Then the picture went out, like the rainbow tints in a bubble that bursts, for my face was buried in the dripping handkerchief.

For some short space—how many seconds it might have measured I cannot tell—I struggled, voicelessly, striving to escape, striving to breathe, knowing through it all that if I could only scream the janitor must surely hear me and come. I knew this; but I knew also that with every breath I tried to draw I merely inhaled the heavy fumes of chloroform, which were gradually steeping my senses in sleep.

I felt them going—going; felt consciousness slipping from me; on a sluggish tide. I began to see, in a dream, white pond lilies floating along the smooth, moving surface of water, bound in the end to fall over a weir, toward which they were almost imperceptibly drifting. Those lilies and my own failing senses were somehow the same; if I could arrest one, I could save both, and I fought for the life of my own soul.

"I mustn't let myself go—I musn't;"

I could hear the admonition bussing queerly in my mind, like a wheel spinning round and round. Once lost to consciousness, I dimly felt that this world was finished for me—I had come to the end; the lilies would go over the weir and be beaten to shreds in the foaming rush of the water.

Then another voice came; very small, very far away it seemed in my strange state, but growing louder, until it shouted thunderously in my brain:

"Don't breathe; hold your breath till he takes away the handkerchief. Pretend to be unconscious."

I had just presence of mind enough left to obey the promptings of this instinct toward self-preservation. I thought that the man would never remove the wet linen pressed over my face; but when I had let my body collapse limply until it fell back into his arms, the handkerchief was withdrawn.

A second longer and I must have gasped wildly for air, filling my lungs with more of the fumes, enough to send the poor, floating lilies, which I still dreamily saw, over the crystal lip of the weir.

My eyes were closed; my head was lying back against the man's shoulder. I knew that he was gazing keenly at me, and I dared not let my eyelids quiver, lest he should suspect that I deceived him.

It would have been even harder than it was to lie motionless, feigning complete unconsciousness, had it not been that the chloroform had already half done its work.

I retained a knowledge of what passed, but hazily, and my mind was clogged, clouded with a heavy indifference to my fate. I was like one who, though dreaming still, is sufficiently awake to know that he dreams—no more.

"What luck! what astounding luck!" the man who had called himself Mr. Wynnstay whispered under his breath, a note of triumph thrilling through the subdued voice. "That it should have been to-night of all nights—after the telegram. Like a lamb—that pokes its nose into the butcher's hand."

The muttered words struck on my brain as if they had been blows from a tiny hammer, each one unerringly aimed to reach the tenderest spot. My ebbing senses came back with a shock, a wrenching of the nerves; still, my body and my spirit felt as if they were separated, and I were trying vainly to fit them together again, so that I could move. As it was, I did not seem to have any control over my own muscles.

"What shall I do—how save myself from him?" I thought. "In a moment it may be too late to decide. Am I to lie quietly here, or am I to stake all on a single move—now—in this instant?"

Yet I could do nothing. My body refused obedience to the brain.

The man gathered me up in his arms and moved across the room. A minute more and my dress was drenched with eau de Cologne. I wondered mistily if it were meant to drown the odor of the chloroform. At all events, it was not dashed into my face, and evidently was not used with the intention of reviving me.

Once more Mr. Wynnstay moved with me in his arms. To my surprise and almost incredulous joy he was going toward the door that led into the hall.

I heard him call in a fussy, anxious tone:

"Denby! Denby! come here, quick!

The door squeaked faintly, and the janitor's startled accents responded:

"Well, sir? Why, whatever's the matter, sir?"

"Good gracious! can't you see for yourself the girl's fainted?—fell over in her chair before she could finish a letter I was dictating to her. She must have been ill when she came—most inconsiderate, I must say. Call a four-wheeler, Denby, as quick as you can. I shall take her to my doctor's house. I can't stand a fainting woman on my hands."

"Pshaw, sir, she'll soon come round again," soothed the janitor.

"I won't trust to that. I'm not the man for this sort of thing. The cab, and make haste about it, Denby. I'll follow you out of doors with her, where it's dark. Not very pleasant for me if anybody should be coming in and catch me with a fainting woman in my arms. A nice situation!"

"All right, sir, if you're bound to have her out of the house," the janitor acquiesced, with a humorous quaver of indulgence in his voice. "I'll have whistled you a four-wheeler inside a couple of minutes, I dare say, though it's a bad time for cabs in this neighborhood, I'm afraid."

Mr. Wynnstay was carrying me out of the house. A cool air blew on my face, and a flurry of rain that had begun to fall from long threatening skies spattered my forehad.

"Confound it," the man uttered, and, with what secretiveness I could imagine, once more pressed over my mouth and nose the chloroformed handkerchief, which he must have hidden in is pocket.

He was afraid of the very thing which had occurred, and behind Denby's back was endeavoring to counteract the restorative effect of wind and rain.

I had been summoning all my strength, all my energies, for an effort to break my invisible bonds; and now I was to be defeated in the moment of success. If I could only hold my breath and not draw in those deadly fumes—

There was the whistle for the cab which was to take me away—where? To my death, perhaps. I believed now that I must have been in the hands of a madman, for he could have no sane motive in wishing to compass the destruction of so insignificant a creature as I. A madman would stop at nothing. It was now or never with me.

Again and again the whistle, and then came the rattle of wheels. A cab had driven through the gates, and the horse's feet were crunching the gravel of the short drive that led up to the house.

The man who held me started forward, the handkerchief no longer covering my face; then I heard him draw in his breath sharply, stepping back so hastily that he stumbled.

Involuntarily, in the instinctive effort to save himself from a fall, his grasp was loosened. I felt myself slipping out of his arms, and with one supreme effort, staggering, panting, quivering, I threw him off, keeping my feet as they touched the ground.

"Help! help!" I whispered feebly, when I would have shrieked aloud.

My eyes were wide open now and staring, though everything swam before them, as if I had been made giddy with the long-continued motion of a merry-go-round. What I saw, what I heard, mingled together in clamoring confusion—a pair of bright lights like great eyes, a hansom, and two men getting out of it.

The yellow light shone on the face of one. I remembered it, and was vaguely glad. But, strangely, being glad caused me to weep, and through my weeping I could still hear down by the gate the shrill whistleing that was to summon a four-wheeled cab.

"Save me!" I articulated hoarsely; and tottering forward I kept myself from falling by seizing with both hands a black coat sleeve which seemed to stretch itself protectingly toward me.

"Don't be frightened. Of course I'll help you," a voice said soothingly. "Has this man been annoying you?"

I pressed closer to him, father from Mr. Wynnstay, whom with clearing vision I could distinctly see, his whiskered face more benevolent of aspect than ever now that the smoked glasses once more hid the queer disparity of his eyes.

"He—he was going to kill me, I think," I panted.

Somehow, looking at that mild countenance, my words sounded unconvincing, foolish. I realized this, and was abashed.

Mr. Wynnstay laughed good-naturedly.

"There!" he exclaimed, "that's what an old bachelor gets for meddling with what doesn't concern him. It's just what I was afraid of. Never mind the cab, Denby. The lady has come to herself."

"Whatever this man says, don't believe him," I pleaded. "For Heaven's sake, don't let him take me away with him!"

"Certainly not," he whose are supported me returned with decision. "But——"

"Certainly not," he whose arm supported Wynnstay irritably. "It is the last thing I want, I can tell you, young lady, now that you seem to need a doctor as little as I do. I really must ask you to let me explain this most vexing dilemma, sir. You are Sir George Seaforth, I believe? I've seen you here before, as well as elsewhere. You will probably recognize my name also when I mention it—Nathaniel Wynnstay, not quite unknown as a solicitor."

"I think I have friends who know you," replied the other, somewhat impatiently I thought. "Still——"

Again the older man interrupted:

"I feel bound to introduce myself, this lady has been misguided enough to believing this to be Holland Park House. I was in the act of going out when I heard her inquiring for an acquaintance of mine living almost next door. Seeing that she was bitterly disappointed when I was able to inform ing her tired and ill, I determined to arrange that she should, after all, spend the night at my friend Mrs. Leatherby-Smith's house.

"My right hand being lame, I suggested that she should write a proposed letter to the housekeeper for my signature. She consented, but hardly had she sat down at the desk in my study when I saw that she was on the point of fainting. I hurried into the adjoining room for some eau de Cologne, which I sprinkled over her, unfortunately without avail. I then called the janitor, and requested him to procure a four-wheeled cab, intending to drive the lady to my physician's, not far off, as I had never seen a woman faint before, and dared not take the responsibility of restoring her. Fearing to be seen in a ridiculous position by some of the other tenants of this house, I hastily carried the lady, apparently still unconscious, out of doors into the shadow of the porch, to wait until the cab should arrive.

"The rest you know, and though I fail to comprehend why the young lady I tried to benefit should accuse me—er—as a would-be murderer, I suppose hysterical women are not responsible for their hallucinations."

"He drugged me!" I stammered weakly, in self-defence, astounded at the plausible manner in which he had turned the story. His version sounded so probable—mine so wildly impossible. "He pressed a handkerchief wet with chloroform over my face. I kept myself from breathing the fumes as well as I could, but I was dazed. Even now everything seems far away and strange."

"You dreamed it all," asserted Mr. Wynnestay. "Quite natural. I have no hard feelings against you—though it is a little discouraging when a man tries to do a kind action to be rewarded by such accusations. What motive could a staid old fellow like me have had, my dear madam, for attempting to drug you?"

"I—don't know," I faltered.

"Ah, I thought so. You will presently, I am sure, admit that you have done me a further injustice. Denby, you heard and saw everything that took place between this young lady and me. Perhaps you will kindly add testimony to mine."

"Certainly, sir," promptly responded the janitor, pleased to be called upon as a witness. "It's all true what Mr. Wynnstay says. He was most kind to the young lady, whom he'd evidently never set eyes on before to-night. When she went into his study for the letter to be written the door was open, and Mr. Wynnstay purticularly ast me to stop in the hall a few minutes till she should want to be shown out. I did stop, and I could easy 'ave seen everything that went on in the study. It wasn't much above five minutes, I should think, before Mr. Wynnstay (one of our oldest tenants, I may say) called out to me that the lady 'd fainted. I was scared, though not, when I came to think of it, surprised, for she was as white as a ghost, and shaky like, when I opened the front door for her; and I thought she'd 'ave dropped when I told her Mrs. Leatherby-Smith didn't live here. Mr. Wynnstay followed me out, and I'd just begun to whistle the four-wheeler when your hansom drove in."

"I've often heard my friends in the flat next mine speak of Mr. Wynnstay," remarked a new voice, which I had not heard before.

It was that of the other man, who had come in the cab with Sir George Seaforth. Sir George Seaforth! What association did that name call up? I asked myself. I could not remember; my head ached blindingly, and I felt too ill for further mental effort. But I knew that this was the man who, near Lady Sophie de Gretton's house, had pulled me out from among the horses and set me safely on the pavement again. To-day seemed full of coincidences; but I was to learn later that this meeting was not a coincidence. Rather, it was a direct result of an earlier incident.

The other man, who had testified last to the immaculate Mr. Wynnstay's integrity, I had never seen before. I felt no curiosity regarding him—only a slight sense of resentment that he should defend my enemy seemingly at my expense.

Sir George Seaforth looked at me, and I met his eyes appealingly, fearful lest Mr. Wynnstay and his backers had alienated him from my cause. But there was no stern incredulity visible on the brown face, though I searched the semi-darkness to find it. The hansom had driven away now, the cabman paid (I indistinctly remembered seeing) by Sir George Seaforth's companion.

The two newcomers, Mr. Wynnstay, the janitor, and I, were the only actors in the scene—the only audience as well —our footlights the bright stream of electricity which poured through the open doors into the nighter

"You oughtn't to be standing out here in the rain," said Sir George Seaforth to me, without answering his friend.

Curiosly, even in that moment, there was room in my mind for triumph that his first thought after all he had heard, was still of my welfare.

"You look awfully ill. What would you like to do? Will you go at once to your friend's house?"

"I can't go now," I answered. "They're away, and——'

"But you still can have the introduction to the housekeeper I promised," benevolently interrupted Mr. Wynnstay. "As I said, I bear you no malice, poor child, for the illusion of a temporarily disordered brain. I'm certain that by this time you are ready to see common sense, and laugh at your former suspicions. Come, now, to prove your regret your injustice, better let me escort you to Mrs. Leatherby-Smith's. We won't trouble any further about the letter; and Holland Park House is only a few steps from here."

"No—no!" I ejaculated.

"What? You don't mean to say that you still believe me a—er—a villian out of melodrama?" Mr. Wynnstay laughed jovially.

He was either a marvellous actor or else—or else he was right, and hunger, fatigue, and excitement had combined to make me dream things unspeakable. Was it, after all, possible that I had been on the point of fainting, without the subtle aid of drugs, and in the clouded moment of swooning imagined the picture in the looking-glass?

(To be Continued.)

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